

AIDS lecture February 26, 1988
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Address
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Presented to the Conference on
Clinical-Pathological Correlates of
Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) Infection
Washington, DC
February 26, 1988

It was the day after my address at the Cordozo High School in Washington that I addressed this group of clinical pathologists. My function here was to say the right things as the Surgeon General to the first ever conference in seven years, which would exploit the combined expertise of clinicians and pathologists. It was indeed an historic occasion.

My role was perfunctory and I reiterated what they all knew that the country needed the combined, collegial efforts of life sciences across the board. We also needed the results of intellectual cross stimulation. We certainly needed more serious and more intense information sharing. What we especially did not need are the old segregated kingdoms of specialization.

I offered congratulations to Dr. Harold Ginzburg of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases and to Dr. Abe Macher of the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology for conceiving this idea and for bringing it to fruition.

I reminded the audience that the purpose behind the joint conference was deadly serious. In spite of all we knew, we didn't know all there was to know about HIV by a long shot. Nevertheless the world literature was already bursting with clinical data regarding AIDS and AIDS-related conditions.

In a similar way we were amassing a truly impressive archive of pathological data indicated the extent to which the virus invaded and destroyed the human mind and body. Certainly both archives were necessary for the development of more effective therapies and overall regimens of patient care.

There was no question that the need was urgent, because the total count since 1981 had passed the 54,000 mark and over 30,000 had died – that was a rate of about 56 per cent. But of those who had had the disease since 1981, over 93 per cent had already died. Therefore, we in government, I assured the audience, were working hard at public education programs, especially directed to people with certain high-risk behaviors, such as needle-sharing and receptive anal intercourse in particular.

The audience was reminded that there were, to the best of CDC's estimates, about a million and a half people in the United States carrying the virus who did not know it.

I closed by reminding them that they as clinicians and pathologists who had come together as friends and as allies and in the context of this precedent-setting conference, and would show each other what could be done in the fight against AIDS.

AIDS is the enemy – a particularly brutal enemy – and AIDS teaches us what we must do together if we hoped to save thousands upon thousands of human lives in the months and years ahead.

Because of the nature of this presentation, there is no index.